**‘The Heart of Chopin’** Winter Sculpture Park Thamesmead 2025

The Polish composer and pianist Frédéric Chopin’s soul-searching ballads speak strongly of a connection to the land, land that is not just a physical place but a spirit, recalling a pre-industrial ethos wherein people felt part of the land; understanding that objects, places, and creatures all possess a distinct essence, agency and free will. We belonged to the places and not places to us.

Chopin died in 1849 in exile in Paris, separated from his beloved homeland. His dying wish was that his heart be taken from his corpse and sent back to Poland. So, while the rest of his remains lie in a Paris cemetery (alongside Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde and Jim Morrison), his sister smuggled his heart, sealed in a jar of cognac, into Warsaw where it would eventually come to be treated as an exceptional artefact within the culture of Poland, afforded the respect usually reserved for saintly relics. Even after being stolen by the Nazis, Chopin’s heart eventually found its way back to Poland.

For the Winter Sculpture Park Show I proposed to install my work ‘The Heart of Chopin’, a sculpture replicating Chopin’s heart, made from non-local clay. Adjacent to the site of its location, I would remove an equivalent amount of the local soil, leaving a hole in the ground.

My work, like Chopin's story, reflects our disappearing relationship with the land as a spiritual entity. It also serves as a memorial for people that live physically and emotionally in two different worlds; people who are displaced, dislocated, torn apart, forced to cross borders into effective exile.

Perhaps symbolically, my proposal was rejected. True to the story of Chopin’s disjoined heart, I smuggled the heart and placed it on the border of the designated sculpture park, where it will beat its song of dislocation, exile, alienation, powerlessness, and desire for belonging.

*‘The Heart of Chopin’ was created in collaboration with Margot Przymierska and Mikey Weinkove.*